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EDITORIALS.

March, 1848, the Beginning of a New Era in the History of Zoology in America. — It is interesting to review the condition of the natural sciences, and especially of zoology, in the United States half a century ago. The pioneers of those days are rapidly passing away, but the records of the societies, the journals, and the isolated books give one, in outlines at least, the status of zoology, while the reminiscences of the older men give the picture vitality. Looking over these old pages and numbering the stories the fathers have told us, we can conjure up, more or less vividly, those primitive days with their inadequate library facilities, their small museums supported only by the greatest self-sacrifice of the few, and also the low esteem in which "bug-hunters" were held by the general public. Indeed, it was at a much later date that Stimpson, hunting for shells in the refuse brought in by the fishermen, was stoned as a crazy man by the men and boys of Marblehead.

From such a review one becomes impressed with the fact that the zoology of that day was not held in high esteem by the colleges, but existed apart from them. There was, it is true, something taught that was labeled zoology in a few institutions. Baird was teaching in Carlisle, Dana at New Haven, Emmons at Williams, and Adams at Middlebury, and earlier still Rafinesque held a chair in Transylvania University in Kentucky, while Nuttall for a few years gave private instruction to a few students at Harvard. As one turns over the pages in which Adams described the shells of Jamaica and of Panama he cannot but wonder at the nature of the instruction in those days. How could it have had any human interest for the student? These exceptions aside, the great proportion of the natural history work of the country was done by men without academic position, and largely by physicians in moments snatched from a busy practice. Indeed, it was regarded as the proper training for the profession of a naturalist to begin with the study of medicine, and the present writer was advised not twenty-five years ago to attend a medical school as an introduction to the study of zoology.

There were then two great zoological centres in America, — Boston and Philadelphia. In Boston the leaders were Binney, Gould, Storer, Wyman, Cabot, Harris, Jackson, Bryant, Brown, and Couthouy;

at Philadelphia the work was being done by Morton, the two Leas, Peale, Conrad, Haldemann, Leidy, and Wilson; and it is a noticeable fact that in this catalogue of names all but two — Leidy and Wyman — were systematic zoologists pure and simple. This fact is but characteristic of the times. It was the day of species describing. There was a wealth of undescribed forms, and the recently organized state surveys, as well as the government expeditions, were daily bringing in new forms to describe, new species to catalogue. When we leave these two cities we find the zoological devotees scattered here and there throughout the country: Mighels at Portland, Wheatland and Cole at Salem, Nichols at Danvers, Tufts at Lynn, Dana and Ayres at New Haven, Fitch at Salem, N.Y., Bailey at West Point, Dekay at New York, Holbrook, Bachmann, Gibbes, and Ravenel at Charleston, Hentz in Florence, Ala., and Kirtland at Cleveland. That curious zoological centre at New Harmony had already broken up and its members were scattered or dead.

The means of publication were few, and the bulk of the zoological papers appeared in the records of the societies of Boston and Philadelphia, two in either city. Besides these there were publishing societies in New York and Salem, while other places, like Hartford, published one or two numbers and then passed out of the scientific world. The only strictly scientific periodical was the *American Journal of Science and Arts*, although now and then a magazine like the *Naturalist* of Boston ran a brief course. It necessarily followed that many a scientific paper was forced into the medical and agricultural journals and buried there almost beyond hope of resurrection. There was but one other means of getting results into print and that was open to but the few. We refer to the State Surveys which came into existence but a short time before, the publications of which reached their scientific height in the survey of Massachusetts, but were published in the most sumptuous form by the state of New York.

Such in outline was the condition of zoology in America half a century ago. It was almost entirely what we now know as systematic zoology and it was all but ignored by the colleges, all of whose energies were turned in the direction of the classics, mathematics, and metaphysics. The times were ripe for a change. In the records of Harvard University is to be found the following minute:

"At a stated meeting of the President and Fellows of Harvard College in Boston, Sept. 25, 1847. Present, President Everett, Dr. Walker, Mr. Lowell, Mr. Curtis, Treasurer Eliot.

"*Voted:* That this board do now proceed to the election of a Professor of Zoology and Geology in the Lawrence Scientific School in the University at Cambridge. Whereupon, ballots being given in, it appeared that Professor Louis Agassiz, late of Neuchâtel, Switzerland, was chosen.

"*Voted:* That the President be requested to lay this election before the Board of Overseers, that they may concur in the same if they see fit."

According to the statement in Marcou's *Life of Agassiz*, we are led to infer that this appointment was accepted in February, 1848. In March Agassiz began his instruction at Harvard, and with it there began a new era in zoological science in America. Anatomy and embryology were henceforth to assume their proper position, and this country was to advance along new lines, until now in morphological science it stands second only to Germany among the nations of the earth. It seems, therefore, peculiarly fitting that the *American Naturalist*, founded as it was by four pupils of Professor Agassiz, — Alpheus Hyatt, Edward Sylvester Morse, Alpheus Spring Packard, and Frederick Ward Putnam, — should pay some attention to the fiftieth anniversary of Agassiz's appearance as a teacher in America, — an anniversary which indicates not only a change in the character of zoological science in America, but as well a change in the academic position of zoology in our educational institutions. We therefore present in the foregoing pages a sketch of the life of Agassiz and reviews of some aspects of his work, kindly written at our request for this occasion.

The Fur-Seal Problem. — We are very glad to see in two or three recent numbers of *Natural Science* editorials upon the fur-seal problem in which the necessity of prohibition of pelagic sealing is admitted, if the herds of the Pribilov and Commander Islands are not to be exterminated. In fact, this journal fully supports the contention of the government of the United States. This is no more than could be expected from a scientific journal. The whole problem of the fur seal is a question of fact, and these facts are capable of but one interpretation, unless they be garbled, as was recently done by one Englishman high in authority. In a word, the position of the British government is indefensible ; but it is hardly possible to hope for any sensible arrangements until there is a change in the personnel of those who are directing the British Empire.